

Research Paper

Occupational Stress among Mathematics Teachers in Kerala: A Cross-Sectional Comparative Study across Demographic and Professional Variables

Bini M.^{1*}, Dr. Soofiya Sayed²

ABSTRACT

Occupational stress among teachers has become a growing concern due to increasing workload, role expectations, and organizational demands, particularly in school settings. The present study aimed to assess the level of occupational stress among mathematics teachers in primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools in Thrissur District of Kerala and to examine differences in stress across demographic and professional variables such as gender, age, locality, educational qualification, employment status, and level of teaching. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and a sample of 200 teachers was selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected using the Occupational Stress Scale (Srivastava & Singh, 1981) and analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, and one-way ANOVA. The results indicated that the majority of teachers experienced moderate levels of stress, with role overload and working conditions emerging as major stressors. Significant differences were found across gender, locality, employment status, age group, and level of teaching, with female, urban, private school, middle-aged, and secondary-level teachers reporting higher stress, while no significant difference was observed based on educational qualification. The study concludes that occupational stress is prevalent among teachers and is influenced by both personal and organizational factors, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and institutional support to enhance teacher well-being.

Keywords: *Occupational Stress, Mathematics Teachers, Demographic and Professional Variables*

Teaching is widely acknowledged as one of the most demanding and stressful professions, requiring sustained cognitive engagement, emotional labor, and continuous adaptation to institutional and societal expectations. In recent years, increasing accountability pressures, curriculum reforms, and evolving pedagogical demands have intensified the occupational stress experienced by teachers across educational levels. Occupational stress refers to the psychological and physiological strain arising when job demands exceed an individual's coping resources, leading to adverse outcomes such as burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and diminished well-being.

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In the educational context, teacher stress has been associated with multiple factors, including excessive workload, time constraints, classroom management challenges, and organizational pressures. Empirical evidence suggests that stress is not only detrimental to teachers' mental and physical health but also negatively impacts teaching effectiveness and student outcomes (Putwain & von der Embse, 2019). Consequently, understanding the mechanisms underlying teacher stress and its associated outcomes has become a critical area of research.

One of the most significant consequences of prolonged occupational stress is burnout, a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Burnout has been widely studied in educational settings and is considered a key mediator between stress and negative professional outcomes (Cui et al., 2018). Furthermore, teacher well-being, which encompasses emotional, psychological, and social functioning, is increasingly recognized as an essential component of effective teaching and sustainable professional engagement. A substantial body of literature highlights the prevalence of occupational stress among teachers. Studies consistently identify workload, administrative responsibilities, time pressure, and classroom management as primary stressors. For example, Yussop et al. (2019) found that excessive workload, including administrative duties, significantly contributes to stress among mathematics teachers, often interfering with instructional quality. Similarly, research conducted in Kerala indicates that teachers experience moderate to high levels of stress, with factors such as vast syllabus coverage, time constraints, and inadequate infrastructure playing significant roles (Raj et al., 2022). Systematic reviews further confirm that teacher stress is a widespread phenomenon, with common stressors including large class sizes, student behavior issues, and lack of resources (Kavitha et al., 2025).

Recent studies also highlight the impact of curriculum reforms and accountability pressures on teacher stress. Putwain and von der Embse (2019) demonstrated that pressure arising from imposed curriculum changes significantly increases teacher stress, particularly in high-stakes educational environments. Burnout is a critical outcome of prolonged occupational stress and has been extensively studied in educational research. According to the Maslach Burnout framework, burnout comprises three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Empirical evidence indicates that job stress is a strong predictor of burnout among teachers (Cui et al., 2018). Research shows that burnout negatively affects teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, and instructional effectiveness. Teachers experiencing burnout are more likely to exhibit reduced engagement, emotional detachment, and lower teaching quality. Furthermore, burnout has been linked to adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depression. The relationship between stress and burnout is not purely direct but is influenced by mediating factors such as coping strategies and social support. Studies suggest that teachers who adopt positive coping mechanisms and receive adequate support are less likely to experience burnout, even under high stress conditions (Austin et al., 2005).

Research on occupational stress among teachers highlights the influence of several demographic variables, though findings are often mixed. Gender differences have been widely studied, with some researchers reporting higher stress among female teachers due to dual role responsibilities (Antoniou et al., 2006), while others find no significant difference, suggesting that organizational factors may play a stronger role (Chaplain, 2008). Age is another important variable, with studies indicating that middle-aged teachers tend to experience higher stress due to increased professional and family responsibilities

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(Huberman, 1993), whereas younger teachers may face stress due to lack of experience (Ingersoll, 2001) and older teachers may cope better due to stability and experience. Locality also contributes to stress variations; urban teachers often report higher stress due to workload, competition, and institutional demands (Borg, 1990), while rural teachers may face stress related to limited resources and isolation. However, the extent of stress varies depending on contextual and institutional factors.

Professional variables such as educational qualification, employment status, and level of teaching further influence occupational stress. Research suggests that educational qualification does not significantly impact stress levels, as job demands remain similar regardless of academic attainment (Klassen et al., 2013), although higher qualifications may sometimes lead to increased expectations. Employment status shows more consistent findings, with private school teachers generally experiencing higher stress due to job insecurity, performance pressure, and administrative control (Sharma, 2014), while government teachers face stress related to bureaucratic processes (Travers & Cooper, 1996). The level of teaching also plays a crucial role, with secondary school teachers often reporting higher stress due to academic pressure, student management issues, and examination responsibilities (Kyriacou, 2001), whereas primary and higher secondary teachers experience different but comparatively lower stressors. Overall, these findings indicate that occupational stress among teachers is multidimensional and influenced by both personal and organizational factors.

The present study aims to:

- a) assess the level of occupational stress among teachers working at primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels in Thrissur District of Kerala; and
- b) examine the significant differences in occupational stress with respect to gender, age, locality, educational qualification, employment status, and level of teaching.

Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the level of occupational stress among mathematics teachers in Thrissur District of Kerala. This design was used to systematically collect, analyze, and interpret data regarding existing stress levels without manipulating any variables.

The study included several demographic and professional categories as *independent variables* for comparison. These comprised gender (male and female), age group (young: 20–30 years, middle: 30–45 years, and older: 45+ years), and locality (rural and urban). In addition, professional characteristics such as educational qualification (undergraduate, postgraduate, and NET/PhD), employment status (government and private), and level of teaching (primary, secondary, and higher secondary) were considered. These categories enabled a comprehensive analysis of differences in occupational stress among teachers across diverse backgrounds and work settings.

The *dependent variable* of the study was occupational stress, measured in terms of overall stress levels as well as domain-wise stress (role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group pressure, responsibility, peer relations, and working conditions).

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Participants

The participants of the study comprised 200 mathematics teachers selected from primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools in Thrissur District of Kerala. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure equal representation across key demographic and professional categories.

The sample was distributed table 1 shows based on employment status and locality, with 100 teachers from government schools and 100 from private schools. Within each category, 50 teachers were selected from urban areas and 50 from rural areas. Gender was also equally represented, with 25 male and 25 female teachers in each subgroup, resulting in a total of 100 male and 100 female participants.

Inclusion Criteria

- Mathematics teachers working in primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools in Thrissur District
- Teachers with a minimum of one year of teaching experience
- Teachers who were actively working during the data collection period
- Teachers who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study

Exclusion Criteria

- Teachers with less than one year of teaching experience
- Teachers who were on long-term leave during the data collection period
- Teachers who were unwilling to participate or did not provide consent
- Non-mathematics teachers

Table 1 Sample distribution

Employment Status	Locality	Male (N)	Female (N)	Total (N)
Government	Urban	25	25	50
Government	Rural	25	25	50
Private	Urban	25	25	50
Private	Rural	25	25	50
Total		100	100	200

Measures

Occupational stress among teachers was assessed using a standardized Occupational Stress Scale developed by Srivastava and Singh (1981). The primary aim of the scale is to measure the level of occupational stress experienced by individuals across various job-related dimensions. The instrument consists of multiple domains, including role overload, role ambiguity, role conflict, group pressure, responsibility, peer relations, and working conditions, which collectively capture different sources of stress in the workplace. The scale typically uses a Likert-type response format, and the total score is obtained by summing individual item responses, with higher scores indicating greater levels of occupational stress. Based on the obtained scores, stress levels are categorized into mild, moderate, and severe. The scale has demonstrated good reliability, with reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients generally above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency. In addition, the tool has established content and construct validity, making it a reliable and widely used measure for assessing occupational stress in educational settings.

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Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage, were used to summarize the level of occupational stress and demographic characteristics of the sample. Inferential statistics were employed to examine differences across groups. The independent samples t-test was used to analyze differences in occupational stress based on dichotomous variables such as gender, locality, and employment status. For variables with more than two categories, such as age group, educational qualification, and level of teaching, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical guidelines in psychological research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring that they were aware of the purpose and nature of the study. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and no personal identifying information was recorded. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. The data collected were used solely for academic and research purposes. Care was taken to ensure that the study did not cause any psychological harm or discomfort, and all responses were handled with sensitivity and respect.

RESULTS

Table 2 Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Occupational Stress Levels

Stress Level	Score Range	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Mild	46 – 107	48	24.00%
Moderate	108 – 169	112	56.00%
Severe	170 – 230	40	20.00%
Total		200	100%

The results of table 2 indicate that occupational stress is highly prevalent among the participants, with the majority experiencing moderate levels of stress. More than half of the sample (56%) falls under the moderate stress category, suggesting that a significant proportion of individuals are experiencing noticeable stress that may affect their daily functioning and work performance, but not yet at an extreme level. This highlights a potential risk group that may benefit from timely intervention to prevent escalation.

About 24% of the participants report mild stress, indicating that nearly one-fourth of the sample is relatively well-adjusted and able to manage work-related demands effectively. This group may be using adequate coping strategies or working in relatively less stressful conditions. However, 20% of the participants fall under the severe stress category, which is a critical concern. This indicates that one-fifth of the sample is experiencing high levels of occupational stress, which could lead to serious psychological, emotional, and physical consequences if not addressed. This group requires immediate attention and intervention, such as stress management programs or counselling. Overall, the findings suggest that while a smaller proportion is managing stress well, a large majority (76%) is experiencing moderate to severe stress, emphasizing the urgent need for workplace interventions, mental health support, and preventive strategies to improve employee well-being.

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Table 3 Occupational Stress across Domains

Domain	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Level of Stress
Role Overload	19.2	4.3	High
Role Ambiguity	13.1	3.1	Moderate
Role Conflict	15.4	3.7	Moderate
Group Pressure	14.2	3.4	Moderate
Responsibility	12	2.9	Low
Peer Relations	11.3	2.6	Low
Working Conditions	16.8	3.9	High
Overall Stress	102	16.5	Moderate

The domain-wise analysis of occupational stress in table 3 and figure 2 provides a clearer understanding of which specific aspects of the job contribute most to stress among the participants.

The findings show that Role Overload ($M = 19.2$, $SD = 4.3$) and Working Conditions ($M = 16.8$, $SD = 3.9$) fall under the high stress category. This indicates that participants are significantly burdened with excessive work demands and are also affected by unfavorable or challenging work environments. These two domains appear to be the major sources of stress, suggesting issues such as heavy workload, time pressure, and possibly inadequate physical or organizational support.

Several domains fall under the moderate stress level, including Role Ambiguity ($M = 13.1$, $SD = 3.1$), Role Conflict ($M = 15.4$, $SD = 3.7$), and Group Pressure ($M = 14.2$, $SD = 3.4$). This suggests that participants experience some uncertainty about their roles, conflicting expectations, and pressure from colleagues or teams. While not extreme, these factors can still affect job satisfaction and efficiency if they persist over time. On the other hand, Responsibility ($M = 12$, $SD = 2.9$) and Peer Relations ($M = 11.3$, $SD = 2.6$) are categorized under low stress, indicating that participants generally feel comfortable with their level of responsibility and maintain relatively healthy relationships with colleagues. These areas can be considered strengths within the work environment. The overall stress score ($M = 102$, $SD = 16.5$) falls under the moderate level, which aligns with the earlier frequency distribution findings. This reinforces that while extreme stress is not dominant, a substantial proportion of individuals are experiencing consistent and impactful levels of stress. In summary, the interpretation highlights that workload and working conditions are the most critical stressors, while interpersonal relationships and responsibility are less problematic. This suggests that organizational-level interventions, such as workload management, role clarity, and improvement of working conditions, would be more effective in reducing overall occupational stress.

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Fig. 2 Domain wise occupational stress

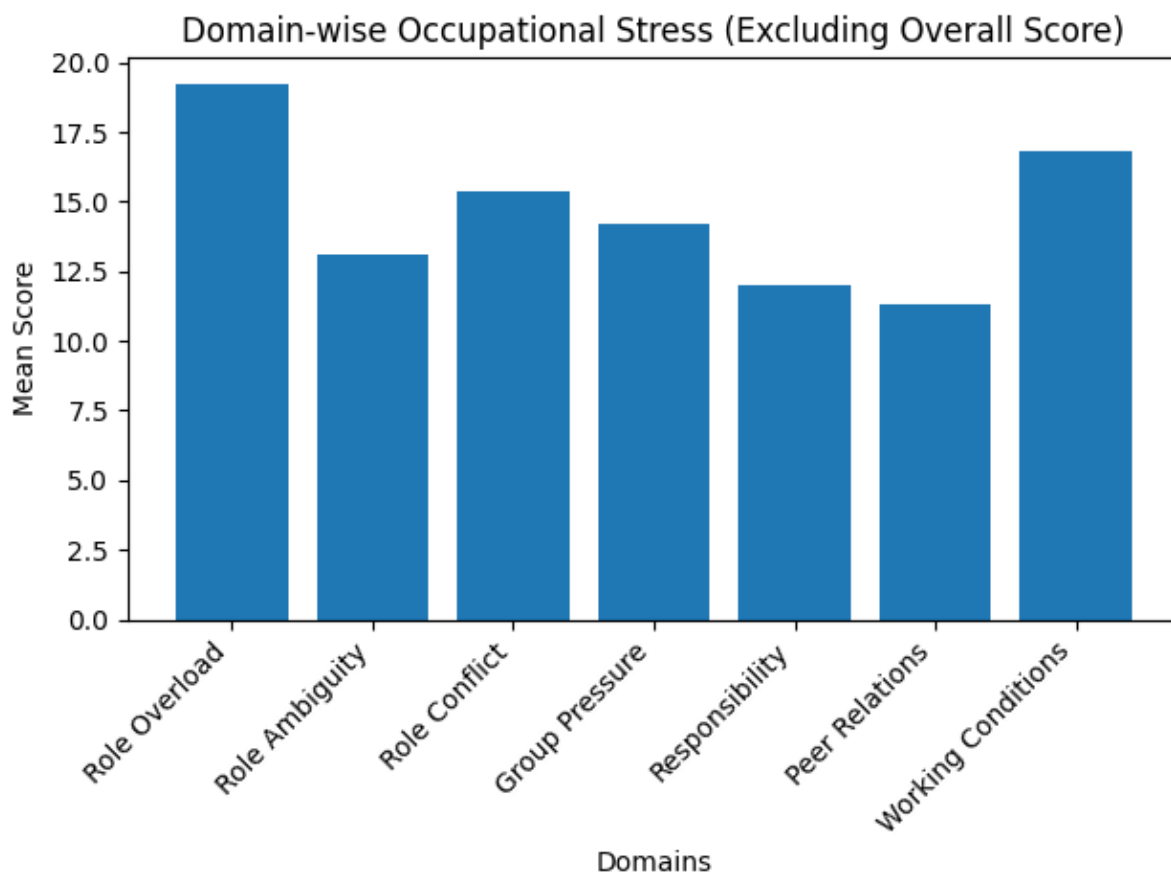


Table 4 Differences in Occupational Stress among Teachers across Demographic and Professional Variables (N = 200)

Variable	Group	N	Mean (M)	SD	Test Value	p-value
Gender	Male	100	96.2	14.5	t = 4.32	0.000*
	Female	100	108.4	15.8		
Locality	Rural	100	94.8	13.9	t = 3.98	0.001*
	Urban	100	106.7	15.2		
Employment Status	Government	100	95.3	14.1	t = 4.75	0.000*
	Private	100	109.2	16		
Age Group	Young (20–30)	65	95.1	14.2	F = 6.85	0.002*
	Middle (30–45)	70	110.5	15.6		
	Older (45+)	65	98.4	13.8		
Educational Qualification	UG	60	100.2	14.5	F = 0.85	0.429
	PG	80	102.1	15.3		
	NET/PhD	60	101.4	13.9		
Level of Teaching	Primary	60	97.5	14.2	F = 5.72	0.004*
	Secondary	70	109.8	15.1		
	Higher	70	104.3	16		
	Secondary					

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The table 4 and figure 1 presents the differences in occupational stress among teachers across various demographic and professional variables, revealing several statistically significant patterns.

Gender: There is a significant difference in stress levels between male and female teachers ($t = 4.32, p < 0.001$). Female teachers ($M = 108.4$) report higher occupational stress compared to male teachers ($M = 96.2$). This suggests that female teachers may be experiencing greater work-related pressure, possibly due to the dual burden of professional and personal responsibilities.

Locality: A significant difference is observed between rural and urban teachers ($t = 3.98, p = 0.001$). Urban teachers ($M = 106.7$) experience higher stress than rural teachers ($M = 94.8$). This may be attributed to factors such as increased workload, competition, and institutional demands in urban settings.

Employment Status: There is a highly significant difference between government and private school teachers ($t = 4.75, p < 0.001$). Private school teachers ($M = 109.2$) report considerably higher stress than government teachers ($M = 95.3$), possibly due to job insecurity, performance pressure, and stricter administrative control in private institutions.

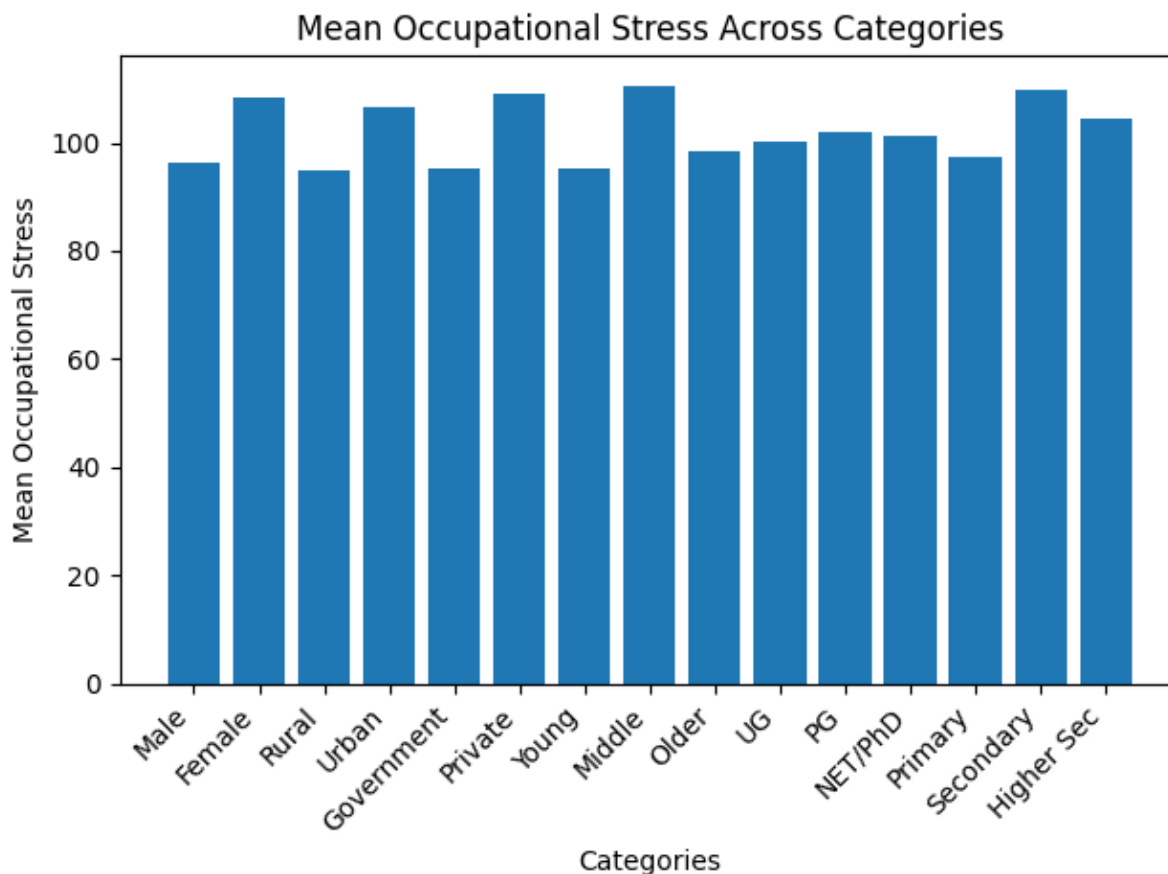
Age Group: A significant difference is found among different age groups ($F = 6.85, p = 0.002$). Teachers in the middle age group (30–45 years) show the highest stress levels ($M = 110.5$), compared to younger ($M = 95.1$) and older teachers ($M = 98.4$). This indicates that mid-career teachers may face greater professional and family-related responsibilities, increasing their stress levels.

Educational Qualification: No significant difference is observed based on educational qualification ($F = 0.85, p = 0.429$). Teachers with UG, PG, and NET/PhD qualifications show similar stress levels, indicating that educational attainment does not significantly influence occupational stress in this sample.

Level of Teaching: There is a significant difference across teaching levels ($F = 5.72, p = 0.004$). Secondary school teachers ($M = 109.8$) experience the highest stress, followed by higher secondary ($M = 104.3$) and primary teachers ($M = 97.5$). This suggests that teaching at the secondary level may involve greater academic pressure, student management challenges, and performance expectations.

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Fig.1 Occupational Stress Across Demographic and Professional Categories



The findings indicate that occupational stress is significantly influenced by gender, locality, employment status, age, and level of teaching, while educational qualification has no significant impact. Groups such as female teachers, urban teachers, private school teachers, middle-aged teachers, and secondary level teachers are particularly vulnerable to higher stress levels. These results highlight the need for targeted interventions focusing on these high-risk groups to effectively manage and reduce occupational stress.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the prevalence, domain-specific factors, and demographic differences in occupational stress among teachers. The findings indicate that occupational stress is highly prevalent, with the majority of teachers experiencing moderate to severe levels. Specifically, 56% of the participants reported moderate stress and 20% severe stress, suggesting that a substantial proportion of teachers are functioning under considerable psychological strain. This finding is consistent with previous research, which identifies teaching as a highly demanding profession associated with elevated stress levels (Johnson et al., 2005; Kyriacou, 2001).

However, some variability exists in the literature. Chaplain (2008) reported that although stress is common among teachers, not all experience it at moderate or severe levels, indicating that contextual factors such as institutional environment and support systems may influence stress intensity. Thus, while the current findings confirm the widespread nature of stress, they also highlight the need to consider situational differences.

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The domain-wise analysis revealed that role overload and working conditions are the primary contributors to occupational stress. This supports the findings of Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015), who emphasized that workload demands and environmental pressures significantly contribute to teacher burnout. High role overload suggests excessive responsibilities and time pressure, while poor working conditions may include inadequate resources or organizational inefficiencies. Additionally, moderate levels of stress in role ambiguity, role conflict, and group pressure align with role theory (Kahn et al., 1964), which posits that unclear expectations and conflicting demands are key sources of occupational stress.

In contrast, responsibility and peer relations were associated with low stress levels, indicating relatively positive interpersonal relationships and manageable accountability among teachers. This is in line with Collie et al. (2012), who found that supportive collegial relationships can act as protective factors against occupational stress.

Significant gender differences were observed, with female teachers reporting higher stress levels than male teachers. This finding is consistent with Antoniou et al. (2006), who reported higher emotional exhaustion among female educators, possibly due to the dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities. However, this result is not universally supported. Klassen and Chiu (2010) found no significant gender differences in teacher stress, suggesting that gender disparities may vary across cultural and institutional contexts. The study also found that urban teachers experience higher stress than their rural counterparts. This aligns with Borg (1990), who noted that urban teaching environments often involve greater workload, competition, and accountability pressures. Similarly, private school teachers reported significantly higher stress than government school teachers, supporting findings by Sharma (2014), who attributed this to job insecurity, performance expectations, and administrative demands in private institutions. Conversely, Travers and Cooper (1996) argued that government teachers may also experience stress due to bureaucratic constraints, suggesting that stressors differ across sectors rather than being absent.

Age-related differences indicated that middle-aged teachers (30–45 years) experience the highest stress levels. This finding is supported by Huberman (1993), who identified mid-career as a critical phase characterized by increased responsibilities and risk of burnout. However, Ingersoll (2001) suggested that younger teachers may experience higher stress due to lack of experience and support, indicating that stress patterns may differ depending on contextual and professional factors.

No significant differences were found based on educational qualification, which is consistent with Klassen et al. (2013), who reported that higher academic qualifications do not necessarily reduce occupational stress. This suggests that structural and organizational factors may have a greater impact than individual educational attainment.

Finally, significant differences were observed across levels of teaching, with secondary school teachers reporting the highest stress. This supports Kyriacou (2001), who noted that teaching at the secondary level involves greater academic pressure, classroom management challenges, and student-related demands. However, Chaplain (2008) suggested that primary teachers may also experience high stress due to multitasking and foundational teaching responsibilities, indicating variation in stressors across teaching levels.

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Overall, the findings highlight that occupational stress among teachers is influenced by a combination of organizational and demographic factors. The identification of high-risk groups—such as female teachers, urban teachers, private school teachers, middle-aged teachers, and secondary-level teachers—emphasizes the need for targeted interventions. Furthermore, the presence of both supporting and contradictory findings in the literature underscores the importance of context-specific approaches to stress management, incorporating both organizational changes and individual coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that occupational stress is highly prevalent among teachers, with a majority experiencing moderate to severe levels of stress. The findings highlight that role overload and poor working conditions are the most significant contributors to stress, while interpersonal relationships and responsibility are relatively less problematic. Significant differences in stress levels were observed across gender, locality, employment status, age, and level of teaching, indicating that occupational stress is influenced by both personal and organizational factors. Particularly, female teachers, urban teachers, private school teachers, middle-aged individuals, and secondary-level teachers were identified as more vulnerable to higher stress levels. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions, organizational support, and stress management strategies to enhance teacher well-being and improve professional effectiveness.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. First, the sample size was limited to 200 teachers, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Second, the study adopted a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. Third, the data were collected using self-report measures, which may be subject to response bias such as social desirability or subjective interpretation. Additionally, the study did not consider certain potential influencing variables such as personality traits, coping strategies, institutional policies, and support systems, which could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of occupational stress. Finally, the study was confined to a specific geographical region, which may limit its applicability to different cultural or institutional contexts.

Future Suggestions

Based on the findings and limitations, several directions for future research are suggested. Future studies may adopt larger and more diverse samples to enhance generalizability across different regions and educational settings. Longitudinal research designs are recommended to better understand the causal relationships and changes in stress levels over time. Further research can also incorporate additional variables such as personality factors, coping mechanisms, emotional intelligence, and organizational support to provide a more holistic understanding of occupational stress. Intervention-based studies, particularly those focusing on techniques such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, and stress management training, can be conducted to assess the effectiveness of strategies in reducing teacher stress. Moreover, comparative studies across different professions or educational systems may offer deeper insights into occupational stress patterns and inform policy-level interventions.

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Conflict of Interest

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